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2002HANOI02255 - CONFIDENTIAL

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ACTION EAP-00

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	DS-00	EB-00	FBIE-00	VC-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00
	IO-00	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	MED-07	AC-01	NSAE-00
	NSCE-00	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	STR-00	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PMB-00
	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00	/016W

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FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7567
INFO ASEAN COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 002255

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/BCLTV AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL 09/16/2012

TAGS: PHUM KIRF PGOV VM HUMANR RELFREE

SUBJECT: CONGEN MEETING WITH THICH HUYEN QUANG

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY EMI L. YAMAUCHI, CG; REASON 1.5(B)
2. (SBU) SUMMARY: CONSUL GENERAL AND POLOFF VISITED THICH HUYEN THQ (THQ) AT THE PHUOC QUANG PAGODA IN QUANG NGAI PROVINCE ON SEPTEMBER 6. THQ WAS CANDID AND FEISTY IN DESCRIBING HIS HEALTH AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS CONFINEMENT. HE CRITICIZED THE GVN'S "CONDUCT OF ELECTIONS
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AND POLICIES ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM." ACCORDING TO THQ, HE WOULD BE WILLING "TO CONSIDER" MOVING BACK TO HIS HOME PROVINCE OF BINH DINH ONCE THE GVN PRESENTS HIM WITH AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT DETAILING WHY HE HAS BEEN DETAINED, THAT HE HAS FULFILLED THE TERMS OF HIS DETENTION, AND THAT HE IS FREE TO TRAVEL. POST UNDERSTANDS THAT GVN AUTHORITIES REFUSED A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DELEGATION'S REQUEST FOR A MEETING WITH THQ DURING THIS SAME TIMEFRAME. END SUMMARY.

3. (U) ON SEPTEMBER 6, CONGENOFFS MET WITH THQ IN A ROOM WITH A LONG TABLE, CHAIRS, AND BOOKCASES, SITUATED ACROSS A COURTYARD FROM THE MAIN PAGODA. A POLICE STATION STANDS OPPOSITE THE PAGODA'S OUTER GATE, ABOUT 200 FEET AWAY. AT ONE END OF THE ROOM WERE A BED AND SOME OTHER SMALL FURNISHINGS. PROVINCIAL ESCORTS FROM THE EXTERNAL RELATIONS OFFICE AND QUANG NGAI'S "COMMITTEE ON RELIGIOUS MANAGEMENT" ATTENDED.

4. (SBU) WHILE THQ SAID HIS HEALTH WAS DETERIORATING (DUE MOSTLY TO OLD AGE, HE NOTED RUEFULLY), HE APPEARED TO BE IN GOOD HEALTH FOR A MAN OF 83 YEARS. HE GREETED CONGENOFFS STANDING UNASSISTED IN A DRIVING RAIN, SAT UPRIGHT THROUGHOUT THE 50-MINUTE MEETING, AND ROSE SPRYLY TO SEE OFF HIS VISITORS. HE WAS ALERT AND COHERENT AT ALL TIMES, BUT APPEARED HARD OF HEARING (ALTHOUGH THIS COULD HAVE BEEN BECAUSE OF THE HARD RAIN AND WIND). THQ'S PRIMARY MEDICAL COMPLAINTS WERE AN INCREASING LOSS OF SENSATION IN HIS RIGHT HAND FINGERS OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS, AND EPISODES OF HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE. FROM TIME TO TIME, HE EXPERIENCED SOME NUMBNESS ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF HIS BODY. STILL, HE
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NOTED HIS AILMENTS DID NOT KEEP HIM FROM WRITING BOOKS ON BUDDHIST RITUALS. HE SAID HE RECEIVED REGULAR MEDICAL CARE AND MEDICATIONS AND HAD NEVER BEEN DENIED PERMISSION TO VISIT A DOCTOR.

5. (SBU) WHILE THE MAJORITY OF HIS TRIPS OUTSIDE THE PAGODA WERE FOR MEDICAL ATTENTION, THQ MENTIONED TWO LOCAL TRIPS WITHIN THE LAST YEAR TO MY LAI AND THE DUNG QUAT INDUSTRIAL ZONE. IN WHAT MAY HAVE BEEN STAGED FOR OUR BENEFIT, THE QUANG NGAI RELIGIOUS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ESCORT REMINDED THQ THAT HE HAD JUST GONE TO QUANG NGAI TOWN THE DAY BEFORE TO VISIT WITH A FELLOW MONK. THQ SAID HE LED A NORMAL LIFE, READING RELIGIOUS TRACTS AND RECEIVING REGULAR VISITORS. LATER ON, HE SAID HE HAD VERY FEW VISITORS, ASIDE FROM THE YOUNG NUNS AND MONKS WHO CAME FOR A FEW HOURS EACH DAY TO COOK AND CLEAN. THESE YOUNG FOLLOWERS ROTATED ABOUT EVERY 15 DAYS. THQ LIVES ALONE,

WITH NO ACCESS TO TELEPHONE OR MAIL. HE HAD BEEN INFORMED OF CONGENOFFS' UPCOMING VISIT BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

16. (U) REGARDING THE BASIS FOR HIS CONFINEMENT, THICH HUYEN QUANG EMPHASIZED THAT HE WAS UNDER DETENTION FOR RELIGIOUS - NOT POLITICAL - REASONS. HE IS UNABLE TO LEAVE THE PAGODA WITHOUT POLICE PERMISSION. THROUGHOUT THE VISIT, THQ REFERRED TO THE FACT THAT HE HAD BEEN DETAINED BY THE "FRENCH COLONIAL GOVERNMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO." HE SAID HE WAS UNAWARE OF THE REASONS FOR HIS CURRENT DETENTION AND HAD NEVER SEEN AN OFFICIAL DOCUMENT DETAILING THE CHARGES AND SENTENCE. ACCORDING TO THQ, NO ONE HAD EVER EXPLAINED THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH HE COULD TRAVEL/MOVE. THUS, WHENEVER HE WAS INVITED TO GO
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ELSEWHERE, HE TOLD PEOPLE HE COULD NOT LEAVE. OTHER PAGODAS WERE HESITANT TO INVITE THQ BECAUSE THEY KNEW HE COULD NOT MOVE.

17. (U) THE RELIGIOUS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE ESCORT INTERRUPTED TO SAY THAT THQ HAD BEEN OFFERED AN OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN TO BINH DINH PROVINCE (HIS HOME PROVINCE) LAST YEAR, BUT "HAD CHANGED HIS MIND." THQ CONTRADICTED HIM, POINTING OUT THAT HE HAD MERELY ASKED TO SEE HIS OFFICIAL CHARGING DOCUMENT, TO KNOW THE REASONS FOR HIS ARREST AND LENGTH OF DETENTION "BEFORE MAKING UP HIS MIND." THQ MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE COULD NOT COMMIT TO A MOVE UNTIL HE HAD SEEN OFFICIAL PAPERS DETAILING THE REASONS FOR HIS DETENTION, CERTIFICATION THAT HE HAD COMPLETED THE DETENTION SUCCESSFULLY AND HAD BEHAVED CORRECTLY, AND CONFIRMATION OF HIS FREEDOM TO TRAVEL.

18. (SBU) THICH HUYEN QUANG STATED THERE HAD BEEN NO (POSITIVE) CHANGES IN VIETNAM WITH REGARD TO ELECTIONS, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, OR HUMAN RIGHTS. HE SAID THE GVN HAD NOT ALLOWED THE UNIFIED BUDDHIST CHURCH OF VIETNAM (UBCV) TO OPERATE AFTER 1975, AND THAT FEWER PEOPLE NATIONWIDE WENT TO WORSHIP. WHEN ASKED HOW HE REGARDED THOSE WHO BELONGED TO THE GVN-RECOGNIZED BUDDHIST CHURCH, THQ

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7568
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CRITICIZED THE ORGANIZATION ITSELF AS STATE-RUN (SOMETHING "CREATED OUT OF EXPEDIENCY, IN A TIME OF NEED"), BUT EMBRACED ITS FOLLOWERS AS "ALL OUR PEOPLE." ASKED WHETHER OTHERS IN VIETNAM OR OVERSEAS WERE AUTHORIZED TO SPEAK FOR HIM, THQ RESPONDED VAGUELY THAT THERE WERE OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS THAT SPOKE ON HIS BEHALF.

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19. (SBU) THE PROVINCIAL ESCORTS ATTEMPTED TO INTERRUPT WHEN THE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS STRAYED "TOO FAR FROM GENERAL CONCERN ABOUT THICH HUYEN QUANG'S HEALTH." BUT CONGENOFFS AND THQ PRESSED ON. AT THE END, THE ESCORTS ENCIRCLED THQ'S CHAIR TO SPEED UP THE FAREWELLS. THQ SAID HE WOULD WELCOME A RETURN VISIT.

110. (C) COMMENT: THIS WAS CONGENOFFS' FIRST MEETING WITH THICH HUYEN QUANG. WHILE WE FOUND HIM TO BE SOMEBODY THAT WE WOULD LIKE TO GET TO KNOW BETTER, WE WERE CONCERNED THAT HE SEEMED TO DWELL ON THE DISTANT PAST -- WEARING THE PRIDE ON HIS SLEEVE OF HAVING BEEN ARRESTED MORE THAN 30 YEARS AGO "UNDER THE FRENCH COLONIALISTS" AND DECRYING THE OUTLAWING OF THE UBCV IN 1975. HE DID NOT WISH TO BE DRAWN INTO A DISCUSSION ABOUT FUTURE ACTIVITIES, ASPIRATIONS, GOALS, SO THE HISTORY LESSON WAS INTERESTING, BUT DID NOT NECESSARILY ADD TO OUR KNOWLEDGE.

111. (C) ON THE OTHER HAND, WHEN CONGENOFFS RAISED THE

NAMES OF TWO BUDDHIST FOLLOWERS WHO HAVE VISITED THQ IN THE PAST AND WHO ARE CURRENT CONGEN CONTACTS -- THICH NHAT THIEN AND A NUN WHO DESCRIBES HERSELF AS THQ'S GRANDNIECE - - THQ'S LANGUAGE INDICATED THAT HE HAD RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE FORMER. THQ DESCRIBED THICH NHAT THIEN AS "SOMEBODY I HAVE WORKED WITH IN THE PAST." AS FOR HIS GRANDNIECE, HE SAID THAT HE DID NOT KNOW WHERE SHE WAS, OR WHAT SHE WAS DOING BECAUSE SHE WAS "USUALLY VERY BUSY."

112. (SBU) POST NOTES THAT ACCORDING TO A PRESS RELEASE FROM THE "QUE ME" ACTION FOR DEMOCRACY IN VIETNAM/VIETNAM COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RIGHTS, HEADQUARTERED IN FRANCE, A
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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION VISITING VIETNAM DURING SEPTEMBER 7-11, WAS DENIED MEETINGS WITH THICH HUYEN QUANG, THICH QUANG DO, AND FATHER NGUYEN VAN LY. POST ALSO NOTES THAT QUANG NGAI PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS DID NOT USE THE EXCUSE OF TORRENTIAL RAINS AND FLOODED ROADS TO CANCEL OUR APPOINTMENT, AS IS OFTEN DONE IN THESE SORTS OF SITUATIONS. HOWEVER, PROVINCIAL OFFICIALS DID TRY TO KEEP THE MEETING BRIEF. THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PROVINCIAL PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE, NGUYEN KIM HIEU, PERHAPS DOWNPLAYING THICH HUYEN QUANG'S STATURE, HAD TOLD CONGENOFFS EARLIER IN THE DAY THAT THQ WAS SIMPLY AN OLD MAN "WHOSE WAY OF THINKING DOES NOT AGREE WITH OURS. WE WOULD JUST LIKE HIM TO GO BACK TO HIS HOME PROVINCE." END COMMENT.

YAMAUCHI

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